

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SSM-03 /061 W
-----041620 141811Z /23

O 141644Z DEC 77 ZFF4
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9947
USDEL SECRETARY RIYADH IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 10643

CAIRO FOR ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IS, US, EG
SUBJECT: ISRAELI REACTION TO BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

1. SUMMARY: THERE IS A GENERAL AIR OF EXPECTATION IN THE COUNTRY AS PRIME MINISTER BEGIN DEPARTS FOR WASHINGTON. THIS EXPECTATION IS REFLECTED IN PRESS COMMENTS, IN REMARKS HEARD IN THE CORRIDORS OF THE KNESSET, AND AMONG PRIVATE ISRAELI CITIZENS. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF BEGIN'S TRIP CAME AS A TRUE SURPRISE, ALTHOUGH ISRAELIS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE INURED TO SURPRISES AND DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENTS. END SUMMARY

2. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON CAME TOO LATE FOR THE MORNING PAPERS. THE AFTERNOON EDITIONS REPORTED THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND COMMENTS FOCUSED
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PRIMARILY ON REPORTS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IS TAKING WITH HIM A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK. IT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT THE PLAN CALLS FOR SOME KIND OF FUNCTIONAL SOLUTION. THERE IS SOME CRITICISM THAT THIS PLAN WOULD NOT BE SUCCESSFUL, ALTHOUGH IT IS RECOGNIZED AS PERHAPS THE BEST WAY OUT OF A DIFFICULT SITUATION. TADMOR WRITES IN DAVAR FOR EXAMPLE THAT THE PLAN WOULD BE

A TIME BOMB BECAUSE: THE PLO WILL INCITE TROUBLES IN THE WEST BANK, JORDAN WILL PRESS FOR THE REMOVAL OF ANY ISRAELI FORCES, SYRIA WILL SEEK TO ENLARGE UPON EVERY INCIDENT, AND THE SOVIET UNION WILL, OF COURSE, FAN THE FLAMES.

3. THE AIR OF EXPECTATION IS ACCOMPANIED BY A CERTAIN FEELING OF APPREHENSION. WHILE ISRAELIS ARE AWARE THAT THE MOMENT OF TRUTH IS APPROACHING WHEN THE GOI MUST RESPOND TO SADAT'S PEACE OFFENSIVE, THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THAT RESPONSE BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF INFORMATION ON THE PRECISE NATURE OF BEGIN'S PROPOSAL. ISRAELIS ARE ALSO CONCERNED THAT THESE VITAL DECISIONS ARE BEING MADE BY A SMALL NUMBER OF MINISTERS AND NOT BY THE GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE. BEGIN'S OBSESSION WITH SECRECY, COMBINED WITH HIS DETERMINATION THAT HE BE SEEN AS A STRONG LEADER WHO IS CAPABLE OF TAKING A DECISIVE STEP TOWARD PEACE, IS SEEN TO HAVE LED HIM TO HOLD HIS PLAN VERY CLOSE. FOR EXAMPLED, ADIVAN OF THE DMC TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER AT THE KNESSET THAT BEGIN HAS ADOPTED A "PRESIDENTIAL" STYLE OF GOVERNING WHICH HE FINDS TROUBLING. OTHER COALITION MKS ALSO EXPRESSED SIMILAR MISGIVINGS: MEIR COHEN OF HERUT TOLD US THE KNESSET HAS NO KNOWLEDGE OF BEGIN'S STRATEGIES AT ALL AND EHUD ULMERT OF LA'AM SAID THE SAME THING, ALTHOUGH HE ADDED THIS WAS TO BE EXPECTED IN THE CURRENT DELICATE STAGE OF EVENTS.

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4. DURING A VISIT TO YEDIOT AHARONOT, WE WERE TOLD BY SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS THAT THEY ARE UNEASY ABOUT THE BEGIN TRIP. THEY SAID THEIR UNEASE DOES NOT ARISE FROM MISTRUST OF BEGIN--THEY ARE PRIMARILY SUPPORTERS OF HIM--BUT FROM A SENSE OF CONFUSION ABOUT HIS ACTIONS. THIS UNEASE REFLECTS THE FACT THAT ISRAELIS ARE NOT ACCUSTOMED TO THE PRESENT INABILITY OF THE PRESS TO ASCERTAIN DETAILS OF POLICIES; IN AN EDITORIAL ENTITLED "THE PEACE ICEBERG," MAARIV SAID THAT THE INVISIBLE PART OF THE CURRENT PEACE MAKING PROCESS IS TEN TIMES BIGGER THAN THE VISIBLE PART.

5. SOME OBSERVERS ALSO QUESTION BEGIN'S TACTICS. THEY THINK HE WILL BE DISAPPOINTED IN HIS APPARENT GOAL OF OBTAINING PRESIDENT CARTER'S ENDORSEMENT OF HIS PLAN. IN ANY CASE, BEGIN SEEMS TO HAVE DEPARTED FROM HIS PRINCIPLE--DECLARED REPEATEDLY DURING HIS JULY VISIT TO WASHINGTON--OF NOT COORDINATING HIS POSITIONS ON BORDERS OR THE WEST BANK WITH THE U.S., BUT INSTEAD RESERVING HIS BARGAINING FOR HIS ARAB ADVERSARIES ACROSS THE NEGOTIATING TABLE.

VIETS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC ATTITUDES, MINISTERIAL VISITS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TELAV10643
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770465-0787
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771255/aaaabuon.tel
Line Count: 117
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 233821
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ISRAELI REACTION TO BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON
TAGS: PINT, OVIP, IS, US, EG, (BEGIN, MENACHEM)
To: STATE SECRETARY
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d2373a04-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009